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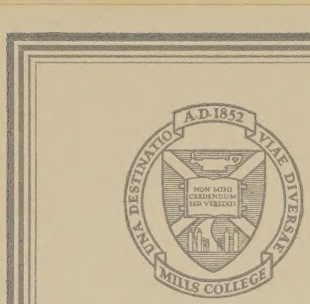


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# SELECTED POEMS OF ALICE MEYNELL

# SELECTED POEMS

OF

Christiana (Thompson)

# ALICE MEYNELL

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE
BY W. M.

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# ALICE MEYNELL

ALICE THOMPSON (who became Alice Meynell in 1877) had the fortune as a girl to find herself in that mid-Victorian era which still held freshly to its heritage from Keats and Shelley, from Wordsworth and Coleridge. It felt its heart torn by the griefs of the Brontës, stirred by their glories; and it almost clung to the hand of Elizabeth Browning. Eagerly awaiting every recurring sign of Tennyson's fertility, it yet respected the long pause of Patmore; and took for its own the volumes of Dante Rossetti and Christina Rossetti, warm from the press. With those two women of song, Elizabeth and Christina, Alice Meynell's name is now commonly linked. But it was not they who moulded her thought or her expression. Her aloof independence was proof against all precedents; and of her prose it may be noted that, notwithstanding her love for Lamb and Landor, only James Russell Lowell is mentioned by her as having in any way influenced her expression. She was her very own spiritual and intellectual self as both woman and writer. That was the secret of the singleness of her personal influence while she lived, and secures enduring freshness and originality in the work she bequeathed.

Mistress Anne Killigrew had been told by Dryden, "thy father was transfused into thy blood." That girls alike with boys inherit from fathers as from mothers, was the theme of a verse where Alice

Meynell, after the desolations of the European War, gave the comforting reminder:

> The crippled world ! Come then,
> Fathers of women with your honour in trust,
> Approve, accept, know them daughters of men,
> Now that your sons are dust.

Her own father, having left Cambridge and unsuccessfully contested two Parliamentary elections, became very much a citizen of the world. After his marriage with Christiana Jane Weller, a beautiful and accomplished girl to whom her adoring friend, Charles Dickens, fitly introduced him, he made his home much in Italy, devoting himself to the liberal learning of the two daughters: Elizabeth, the elder, afterwards Lady Butler, famous as a war painter; and Alice, who early began to put her rhymed thoughts shyly upon paper. Despite the affectionate appreciativeness that ruled her home (usually an English one), her compositions remained mostly her own secret until a friend, to whom they were confided, encouraged her to show them to others and then to print them.

The volume of *Preludes* was issued (for the girl, what an association!) by Tennyson's then publisher, Henry S. King, on the word of his "reader"—later his successor—C. Kegan Paul, who, not trusting his own judgment all the way, read some of them aloud to George Eliot, receiving her deciding approbation. The critics were mostly silent; and even those who praised, hesitated. But the volume made its own quiet way, Ruskin the very first in his soaring praises: "The last verse of that perfectly

heavenly ' Letter of a girl to her own old age,' the whole of ' San Lorenzo's Mother,' and the end of the ' Sonnet to a Daisy,' are the finest things I have yet seen or felt in modern verse." Rossetti, too, spread the news of the young poet's advent, reciting " Renouncement " to his friends as " one of the three finest sonnets ever written by women." Browning, having read a brief quotation of her verse that was buried in a halting press-appreciation, " conceived the desire to read the rest for myself," and found its beauty " even beyond what the indifference of the reviewer should have prepared me for." The volume brought her many a friend—and more. For the reviewer in *The Pall Mall Gazette*—a paper to which she later was to be a conspicuous contributor—quoted the sonnet, " My heart shall be thy Garden," and found for it a reader whom it reached revealingly. A consequent introduction to the sonneteer by a common friend was followed by a marriage that fulfilled for him Crashaw's " heaven-on-earth " for forty-five years.

On Mrs. Wilfrid Meynell now fell a long silence as a poet. The Muse has her jealousies; for the domesticities, and what Elizabeth Browning called the " sweet sense of providing," are not the fashioners of those " sweetest songs " that breed from " saddest thoughts." Eight children were born, one of whom died in infancy: a grief that put into poetry the dread reminder that the giver of life is also the giver of death: " And she who slays is she who bears, who bears." A like sensitiveness to life's cruelties put her, for all her reticence, on political platforms, and marched her in multitudinous proces-

sions, in favour of the granting of votes to women and the opening of long closed professional doors. Compassion was the companion of all her walks abroad, for the over-burdened man and animal; for the beggar-woman to whom she cried with her gift, in Portuguese fashion, " Have patience, little saint "; for the underfed in London slums which she at one time sedulously visited; and for the beast in the shambles, in pity for whom she refused to eat meat until, after long persuasion, she sought by more impersonal methods to further laggard reforms in the methods of slaughter.

Her married life matured her vigilance as a mistress of prose. In W. E. Henley of *The Scots Observer* and *The National Observer*, she encountered an editor who heartened her by his boisterous welcomes: " That woman's taking her place at the steering wheel " was one of his recorded acclaims. Later, in *The Pall Mall Gazette* of Harry Cust's editorship, she was accorded a weekly column which left her a large range in the choice of subjects. George Meredith, reading here her " princely journalism," sought with her an acquaintance that soon became a " dearest friendship." In a magazine —those were still days of the magazine—he spoke of her words as having the " living tremor in them," just as he had said that his own Carinthia's had the " throb beneath them." Of her essays, he wrote: " The surprise coming on us from their combined grace of manner and sanity of thought is like one's dream of what the recognition of a new truth would be. They leave a sense of stilled singing on the mind they fill. The writing is limpid in its depths."

Coventry Patmore, too, her yet warmer admirer, published, when Tennyson died, his unavailing plea for her succession to the laureateship. Her close friendship for such seniors coincided with that for her contemporaries, and for her juniors, chief among whom was Francis Thompson, who addressed to her his sequence of poems, *Love in Dian's Lap*, of which Patmore said that Beatrice or Laura might have been proud. Of all the homage paid to her, another chosen friend, J. L. Garvin, well said: "Alice Meynell was in herself a person of her age, sure, as I think, of perpetual remembrance, even if half a dozen of her shining contemporaries had not competed in vain to spoil her with praise. It was what no one could do. Recognition only made her humble." And these contemporary praises notwithstanding, G. K. Chesterton predicted: "She was deservedly famous; but I will venture to prophesy that her fullest fame is yet to come. The whole modern world must immeasurably enlarge itself before it comes near the measure of her mind." She died in London on November 27, 1922.

W. M.

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# EARLY POEMS

## A LETTER FROM A GIRL TO HER OWN OLD AGE

Listen, and when thy hand this paper presses,
O time-worn woman, think of her who blesses
What thy thin fingers touch, with her caresses.

O mother, for the weight of years that break thee!
O daughter, for slow Time must yet awake thee,
And from the changes of my heart must make thee.

O fainting traveller, morn is grey in heaven.
Dost thou remember how the clouds were driven?
And are they calm about the fall of even?

Pause near the ending of thy long migration,
For this one sudden hour of desolation
Appeals to one hour of thy meditation.

Suffer, O silent one, that I remind thee
Of the great hills that stormed the sky behind thee,
Of the wild winds of power that have resigned thee.

Know that the mournful plain where thou must wander
Is but a grey and silent world, but ponder
The misty mountains of the morning yonder.

Listen:—the mountain winds with rain were fretting,
And sudden gleams the mountain-tops besetting.
I cannot let thee fade to death, forgetting.

What part of this wild heart of mine I know not
Will follow with thee where the great winds blow not,
And where the young flowers of the mountain grow not.

. . . . . .

I have not writ this letter of divining
To make a glory of thy silent pining,
A triumph of thy mute and strange declining.

Only one youth, and the bright life was shrouded.
Only one morning, and the day was clouded.
And one old age with all regrets is crowded.

O hush, O hush! Thy tears my words are steeping.
O hush, hush, hush! So full, the fount of weeping?
Poor eyes, so quickly moved, so near to sleeping?

Pardon the girl; such strange desires beset her.
Poor woman, lay aside the mournful letter
That breaks thy heart; the one who wrote, forget her:

The one who now thy faded features guesses,
With filial fingers thy grey hair caresses,
With morning tears thy mournful twilight blesses.

## BUILDERS OF RUINS

We build with strength the deep tower wall
That shall be shattered thus and thus.
And fair and great are court and hall,
But *how* fair—this is not for us,
Who know the lack that lurks in all.

We know, we know how all too bright
The hues are that our painting wears,
And how the marble gleams too white;—
We speak in unknown tongues, the years
Interpret everything aright,

And crown with weeds our pride of towers,
And warm our marble through with sun,
And break our pavements through with flowers,
With an Amen when all is done,
Knowing these perfect things of ours.

O days, we ponder, left alone,
Like children in their lonely hour,
And in our secrets keep your own,
As seeds the colour of the flower.
To-day they are not all unknown—

The stars that 'twixt the rise and fall,
Like relic-seers, shall one by one
Stand musing o'er our empty hall;
And setting moons shall brood upon
The frescoes of our inward wall.

And when some midsummer shall be,
  Hither will come some little one
(Dusty with bloom of flowers is he),
  Sit on a ruin i' the late long sun,
And think, one foot upon his knee.

And where they wrought, these lives of ours,
  So many-worded, many-souled,
A North-west wind will take the towers,
  And dark with colour, sunny and cold,
Will range alone among the flowers.

And here or there, at our desire,
  The little clamorous owl shall sit
Through her still time; and we aspire
  To make a law (and know not it)
Unto the life of a wild briar.

Our purpose is distinct and dear,
  Though from our open eyes 'tis hidden.
Thou, Time to come, shalt make it clear,
  Undoing our work; we are children chidden
With pity and smiles of many a year.

Who shall allot the praise, and guess
  What part is yours and what is ours?—
O years that certainly will bless
  Our flowers with fruits, our seeds with flowers,
With ruin all our perfectness.

Be patient, Time, of our delays,
  Too happy hopes, and wasted fears,
Our faithful ways, our wilful ways;
  Solace our labours, O our seers
The seasons, and our bards the days;

And make our pause and silence brim
  With the shrill children's play, and sweets
Of those pathetic flowers and dim,
  Of those eternal flowers, my Keats
Dying felt growing over him!

## SPRING ON THE ALBAN HILLS

O'er the Campagna it is dim warm weather;
The Spring comes with a full heart silently,
And many thoughts; a faint flash of the sea
Divides two mists; straight falls the falling feather.

With wild Spring meanings hill and plain together
Grow pale, or flush with a dust of flowers.
Rome in the ages, dimmed with all her towers,
Floats in the midst, a little cloud at tether.

I fain would put my hands about thy face,
Thou with thy thoughts, who art another Spring,
And draw thee to me like a mournful child.

Thou lookest on me from another place;
I touch not this day's secret, nor the thing
That in the silence makes thy soft eyes wild.

## YOUR OWN FAIR YOUTH

Your own fair youth, you care so little for it,
Smiling towards Heaven, you would not stay the advances
Of time and change upon your happiest fancies.
I keep your golden hour, and will restore it.

If ever, in time to come, you would explore it—
Your old self, whose thoughts went like last year's pansies,
Look unto me; no mirror keeps its glances;
In my unfailing praises now I store it.

To guard all joys of yours from Time's estranging,
I shall be then a treasury where your gay,
Happy, and pensive past for ever is.

I shall be then a garden charmed from changing,
In which your June has never passed away.
Walk there awhile among my memories.

## THE YOUNG NEOPHYTE

Who knows what days I answer for to-day?
Giving the bud I give the flower, I bow
This yet unfaded and a fading brow;
Bending these knees and feeble knees, I pray.
Thoughts yet unripe in me I bend one way,
Give one repose to pain I know not now,
One check to joy that comes, I guess not how.
I dedicate my fields when Spring is grey.

O rash! (I smile) to pledge my hidden wheat.
I fold to-day at altars far apart
Hands trembling with what toils? In their retreat
I seal my love to-be, my folded art.
I light the tapers at my head and feet,
And lay the crucifix on this silent heart.

## RENOUNCEMENT

I MUST not think of thee; and, tired yet strong,
I shun the thought that lurks in all delight—
The thought of thee—and in the blue heaven's height,
And in the sweetest passage of a song.
Oh, just beyond the fairest thoughts that throng
This breast, the thought of thee waits, hidden yet bright;
But it must never, never come in sight;
I must stop short of thee the whole day long.

But when sleep comes to close each difficult day,
When night gives pause to the long watch I keep,
And all my bonds I needs must loose apart,
Must doff my will as raiment laid away,—
With the first dream that comes with the first sleep
I run, I run, I am gathered to thy heart.

## AFTER A PARTING

Farewell has long been said; I have forgone thee;
I never name thee even.
But how shall I learn virtues and yet shun thee?
For thou art so near Heaven
That heavenward meditations pause upon thee.

Thou dost beset the path to every shrine;
My trembling thoughts discern
Thy goodness in the good for which I pine;
And, if I turn from but one sin, I turn
Unto a smile of thine.

How shall I thrust thee apart
Since all my growth tends to thee night and day—
To thee faith, hope, and art?
Swift are the currents setting all one way;
They draw my life, my life, out of my heart.

## THOUGHTS IN SEPARATION

We never meet; yet we meet day by day
  Upon those hills of life, dim and immense—
  The good we love, and sleep, our innocence.
O hills of life, high hills! And, higher than they,

Our guardian spirits meet at prayer and play.
  Beyond pain, joy, and hope, and long suspense,
  Above the summits of our souls, far hence,
An angel meets an angel on the way.

Beyond all good I ever believed of thee,
  Or thou of me, these always love and live.
And, though I fail of thy ideal of me,

My angel falls not short. They greet each other.
  Who knows, they may exchange the kiss we give,
Thou to thy crucifix, I to my mother.

## A FAREWELL

FAREWELL to one now silenced quite,
Sent out of hearing, out of sight,—
  My friend of friends, whom I shall miss.
  He is not banished, though, for this,—
Nor he, nor sadness, nor delight.

Though I shall talk with him no more,
A low voice sounds upon the shore.
  He must not watch my resting-place,
  But who shall drive a mournful face
From the sad winds about my door?

I shall not hear his voice complain,
But who shall stop the patient rain?
  His tears must not disturb my heart,
  But who shall change the years, and part
The world from every thought of pain?

Although my life is left so dim,
The morning crowns the mountain-rim;
  Joy is not gone from summer skies,
  Nor innocence from children's eyes,
And all these things are part of him.

He is not banished, for the showers
Yet wake this green warm earth of ours.
  How can the summer but be sweet?
  I shall not have him at my feet,
And yet my feet are on the flowers.

## TO A DAISY

SLIGHT as thou art, thou art enough to hide
Like all created things, secrets from me,
And stand a barrier to eternity.
And I, how can I praise thee well and wide
From where I dwell—upon the hither side?
Thou little veil for so great mystery,
When shall I penetrate all things and thee,
And then look back? For this I must abide,
Till thou shalt grow and fold and be unfurled
Literally between me and the world.
Then I shall drink from in beneath a spring,
And from a poet's side shall read his book.
O daisy mine, what will it be to look
From God's side even of such a simple thing?

# A POET'S FANCIES

## I

## THE LOVE OF NARCISSUS

Like him who met his own eyes in the river,
The poet trembles at his own long gaze
That meets him through the changing nights and days
From out great Nature; all her waters quiver
With his fair image facing him for ever;
The music that he listens to betrays
His own heart to his ears; by trackless ways
His wild thoughts tend to him in long endeavour.

His dreams are far among the silent hills;
His vague voice calls him from the darkened plain
With winds at night; strange recognition thrills
His lonely heart with piercing love and pain;
He knows again his mirth in mountain rills,
His weary tears that touch him with the rain.

## II

## TO ANY POET

Thou who singest through the earth
All the earth's wild creatures fly thee;
Everywhere thou marrest mirth,—
Dumbly they defy thee;
There is something they deny thee.

Pines thy fallen nature ever
For the unfallen Nature sweet.
But she shuns thy long endeavour,
Though her flowers and wheat
Throng and press thy pausing feet.

Though thou tame a bird to love thee,
Press thy face to grass and flowers,
All these things reserve above thee
Secrets in the bowers,
Secrets in the sun and showers.

Sing thy sorrow, sing thy gladness,
In thy songs must wind and tree
Bear the fictions of thy sadness,
Thy humanity.
For their truth is not for thee.

Wait, and many a secret nest,
Many a hoarded winter-store
Will be hidden in thy breast.
Things thou longest for
Will not fear or shun thee more.

Thou shalt intimately lie
In the roots of flowers that thrust
Upwards from thee to the sky,
With no more distrust,
When they blossom from thy dust.

Silent labours of the rain
Shall be near thee, reconciled;
Little lives of leaves and grain,
    All things shy and wild,
Tell thee secrets, quiet child.

Earth, set free from thy fair fancies
And the art thou shalt resign,
Will bring forth her rue and pansies
    Unto more divine
Thoughts than any thoughts of thine.

Nought will fear thee, humbled creature.
There will lie thy mortal burden
Pressed unto the heart of Nature,
    Songless in a garden,
With a long embrace of pardon.

Then the truth all creatures tell,
And His will Whom thou entreatest,
Shall absorb thee; there shall dwell
    Silence, the completest
Of thy poems, last, and sweetest.

## III

## TO ONE POEM IN A SILENT TIME

Who looked for thee, thou little song of mine?
  This winter of a silent poet's heart
  Is suddenly sweet with thee, but what thou art,
Mid-winter flower, I would I could divine.

Art thou a last one, orphan of thy line?
Did the dead summer's last warmth foster thee?
Or is Spring folded up unguessed in me,
And stirring out of sight,—and thou the sign?

Where shall I look—backwards or to the morrow
For others of thy fragrance, secret child?
Who knows if last things or if first things claim thee?

—Whether thou be the last smile of my sorrow,
Or else a joy too sweet, a joy too wild?
How, my December violet, shall I name thee?

## IV

## THE MOON TO THE SUN

*The Poet sings to her Poet*

As the full moon shining there
To the sun that lighteth her
Am I unto thee for ever,
O my secret glory-giver!
O my light, I am dark but fair,
Black but fair.

Shine, Earth loves thee! And then shine
And be loved through thoughts of mine.
All thy secrets that I treasure
I translate them at my pleasure.
I am crowned with glory of thine,
Thine, not thine.

I make pensive thy delight,
And thy strong gold silver-white.
Though all beauty of mine thou makest,
Yet to earth which thou forsakest
I have made thee fair all night,
Day all night.

## V

## A SONG OF DERIVATIONS

I COME from nothing; but from where
Come the undying thoughts I bear?
Down, through long links of death and birth,
From the past poets of the earth.
My immortality is there.

I am like the blossom of an hour.
But long, long vanished sun and shower
Awoke my breath i' the young world's air.
I track the past back everywhere
Through seed and flower and seed and flower.

Or I am like a stream that flows
Full of the cold springs that arose
In morning lands, in distant hills;
And down the plain my channel fills
With melting of forgotten snows.

Voices, I have not heard, possessed
My own fresh songs; my thoughts are blessed
With relics of the far unknown.
And mixed with memories not my own
The sweet streams throng into my breast.

Before this life began to be,
The happy songs that wake in me
Woke long ago and far apart.
Heavily on this little heart
Presses this immortality.

## VI

## SINGERS TO COME

No new delights to our desire
The singers of the past can yield.
I lift mine eyes to hill and field,
And see in them your yet dumb lyre,
Poets unborn and unrevealed.

Singers to come, what thoughts will start
To song? what words of yours be sent
Through man's soul, and with earth he blent?
These worlds of nature and the heart
Await you like an instrument.

Who knows what musical flocks of words
Upon these pine-tree tops will light,
And crown these towers in circling flight,
And cross these seas like summer birds,
And give a voice to the day and night?

Something of you already is ours;
Some mystic part of you belongs
To us whose dreams your future throngs,
Who look on hills, and trees, and flowers,
Which will mean so much in your songs.

I wonder, like the maid who found,
And knelt to lift, the lyre supreme
Of Orpheus from the Thracian stream.
She dreams on its sealed past profound;
On a deep future sealed I dream.

She bears it in her wanderings
Within her arms, and has not pressed
Her unskilled fingers, but her breast
Upon those silent sacred strings;
I, too, clasp mystic strings at rest.

For I, i' the world of lands and seas,
The sky of wind and rain and fire,
And in man's world of long desire—
In all that is yet dumb in these—
Have found a more mysterious lyre.

## VII

## IN EARLY SPRING

O SPRING, I know thee! Seek for sweet surprise
In the young children's eyes.
But I have learnt the years, and know the yet
Leaf-folded violet.
Mine ear, awake to silence, can foretell
The cuckoo's fitful bell.
I wander in a grey time that encloses
June and the wild hedge-roses.
A year's procession of the flowers doth pass
My feet, along the grass.
And all you wild birds silent yet, I know
The notes that stir you so,
Your songs yet half devised in the dim dear
Beginnings of the year.
In these young days you meditate your part;
I have it all by heart.
I know the secrets of the seeds of flowers
Hidden and warm with showers,
And how, in kindling Spring, the cuckoo shall
Alter his interval.
But not a flower or song I ponder is
My own, but memory's.
I shall be silent in those days desired
Before a world inspired.
O all brown birds, compose your old song-phrases,
Earth, thy familiar daisies!

A poet mused upon the dusky height,
Between two stars towards night,
His purpose in his heart. I watched, a space,
The meaning of his face:
There was the secret, fled from earth and skies,
Hid in his grey young eyes.
My heart and all the Summer wait his choice,
And wonder for his voice.
Who shall foretell his songs, and who aspire
But to divine his lyre?
Sweet earth, we know thy dimmest mysteries,
But he is lord of his.

## VIII

## UNLINKED

If I should quit thee, sacrifice, forswear,
To what, my art, shall I give thee in keeping?
To the long winds of heaven? Shall these come sweeping
My songs forgone against my face and hair?

Or shall the mountain streams my lost joys bear,
My past poetic pain in the rain be weeping?
No, I shall live a poet waking, sleeping,
And I shall die a poet unaware.

From me, my art, thou canst not pass away;
And I, a singer though I cease to sing,
Shall own thee without joy in thee or woe.

Through my indifferent words of every day,
Scattered and all unlinked the rhymes shall ring,
And make my poem; and I shall not know.

## MY HEART SHALL BE THY GARDEN

My heart shall be thy garden. Come, my own,
Into thy garden. Thine be happy hours
Among my fairest fruits, my tallest flowers,
From root to crowning petal thine alone.
Thine is the place from where the seeds are sown,
Up to the sky enclosed, with all its showers.
But ah, the birds, the birds! Who shall build bowers
To keep these thine? O friend, the birds have flown.

For as these come and go, and quit our pine
To follow the sweet season, or, new-comers,
Sing one song only from our alder trees,
My heart has thoughts, which, though thine eyes hold mine,
Flit to the silent world and other summers
With wings that dip beyond the silver seas.

# LATER POEMS

## THE SHEPHERDESS

She walks—the lady of my delight—
A shepherdess of sheep.
Her flocks are thoughts. She keeps them white;
She guards them from the steep;
She feeds them on the fragrant height,
And folds them in for sleep.

She roams maternal hills and bright,
Dark valleys safe and deep.
Into that tender breast at night
The chastest stars may peep.
She walks—the lady of my delight—
A shepherdess of sheep.

She holds her little thoughts in sight,
Though gay they run and leap.
She is so circumspect and right;
She has her soul to keep.
She walks—the lady of my delight—
A shepherdess of sheep.

## THE LADY POVERTY

The Lady Poverty was fair:
But she has lost her looks of late,
With change of times and change of air.
Ah slattern! she neglects her hair,
Her gown, her shoes; she keeps no state
As once when her pure feet were bare.

Or—almost worse, if worse can be—
She scolds in parlours, dusts and trims,
Watches and counts. O, is this she
Whom Francis met, whose step was free,
Who with Obedience carolled hymns,
In Umbria walked with Chastity?

Where is her ladyhood? Not here,
Not among modern kinds of men;
But in the stony fields, where clear
Through the thin trees the skies appear,
In delicate spare soil and fen,
And slender landscape and austere.

## WEST WIND IN WINTER

Another day awakes. And who—
  Changing the world—is this?
He comes at whiles, the winter through,
  West Wind! I would not miss
His sudden tryst: the long, the new
  Surprises of his kiss.

Vigilant, I make haste to close
  With him who comes my way.
I go to meet him as he goes;
  I know his note, his lay,
His colour and his morning-rose,
  And I confess his day.

My window waits; at dawn I hark
  His call; at morn I meet
His haste around the tossing park
  And down the softened street;
The gentler light is his; the dark,
  The grey—he turns it sweet.

So too, so too, do I confess
  My poet when he sings.
He rushes on my mortal guess
  With his immortal things.
I feel, I know him. On I press—
  He finds me 'twixt his wings.

## "WHY WILT THOU CHIDE?"

Why wilt thou chide,
Who hast attained to be denied?
O learn, above
All price is my refusal, Love.
My sacred Nay
Was never cheapened by the way.
Thy single sorrow crowns thee lord
Of an unpurchasable word.

O strong, O pure!
As Yea makes happier loves secure,
I vow thee this
Unique rejection of a kiss.
I guard for thee
This jealous sad monopoly.
I seal this honour thine; none dare
Hope for a part in thy despair.

## THE MODERN MOTHER

O, WHAT a kiss
With filial passion overcharged is this!
To this misgiving breast
This child runs, as a child ne'er ran to rest
Upon the light heart and the unoppressed.

Unhoped, unsought!
A little tenderness, this mother thought
The utmost of her meed.
She looked for gratitude; content indeed
With thus much that her nine years' love had bought.

Nay, even with less.
This mother, giver of life, death, peace, distress,
Desired ah! not so much
Thanks as forgiveness; and the passing touch
Expected, and the slight, the brief caress.

O filial light
Strong in these childish eyes, these new, these bright
Intelligible stars! Their rays
Are near the constant earth, guides in the maze,
Natural, true, keen in this dusk of days.

## SUMMER IN ENGLAND, 1914

On London fell a clearer light;
Caressing pencils of the sun
Defined the distances, the white
Houses transfigured one by one,
The "long, unlovely street" impearled.
O what a sky has walked the world!

Most happy year! And out of town
The hay was prosperous, and the wheat;
The silken harvest climbed the down;
Moon after moon was heavenly-sweet
Stroking the bread within the sheaves,
Looking twixt apples and their leaves.

And while this rose made round her cup,
The armies died convulsed. And when
This chaste young silver sun went up
Softly, a thousand shattered men,
One wet corruption, heaped the plain,
After a league-long throb of pain.

Flower following tender flower; and birds,
And berries; and benignant skies
Made thrive the serried flocks and herds.—
Yonder are men shot through the eyes.
Love, hide thy face
From man's unpardonable race!

## A FATHER OF WOMEN

### Ad Sororem E. B.

" *Thy father was transfused into thy blood.*"
*Dryden's Ode to Mrs. Anne Killigrew.*

Our father works in us,
The daughters of his manhood. Not undone
Is he, not wasted, though transmuted thus,
And though he left no son.

Therefore on him I cry
To arm me: " For my delicate mind a casque,
A breastplate for my heart, courage to die,
Of thee, captain, I ask.

" And shepherd-father, thou
Whose staff folded my thoughts before my birth,
Control them now I am of earth, and now
Thou art no more of earth.

" O liberal, constant, dear!
Crush in my nature the ungenerous art
Of the inferior; set me high, and here,
Here garner up thy heart."

Like to him now are they,
The million living fathers of the War—
Mourning the crippled world, the bitter day—
Whose striplings are no more.

The crippled world! Come then,
Fathers of women with your honour in trust;
Approve, accept, know them daughters of men,
Now that your sons are dust.

## TO SYLVIA: TWO YEARS OLD

Long life to thee, long virtue, long delight,
A flowering early and late!
Long beauty, grave to thought and gay to sight,
A distant date!

Yet, as so many poets love to sing
(When young the child will die),
"No autumn will destroy this lovely spring,"
So, Sylvia, I.

I'll write thee dapper verse and touching rhyme;
"Our eyes shall not behold—"
The commonplace shall serve for thee this time:
"Never grow old."

For there's another way to stop thy clock
Within my cherishing heart,
To carry thee unalterable, and lock
Thy youth apart:

Thy flower, for me, shall evermore be hid
In this close bud of thine,
Not, Sylvia, by thy death—O God forbid!—
Merely by mine.

## A THRUSH BEFORE DAWN

A voice peals in this end of night
  A phrase of notes resembling stars,
Single and spiritual notes of light.
  What call they at my window-bars?
    The South, the past, the day to be,
    An ancient infelicity.

Darkling, deliberate, what sings
  This wonderful one, alone, at peace?
What wilder things than song, what things
  Sweeter than youth, clearer than Greece,
    Dearer than Italy, untold
    Delight, and freshness centuries old?

And first first-loves, a multitude,
  The exaltation of their pain;
Ancestral childhood long renewed;
  And midnights of invisible rain;
    And gardens, gardens, night and day,
    Gardens and childhood all the way.

What Middle Ages passionate,
  O passionless voice! What distant bells
Lodged in the hills, what palace state
  Illyrian! For it speaks, it tells,
    Without desire, without dismay,
    Some morrow and some yesterday.

All-natural things! But more—Whence came
  This yet remoter mystery?
How do these starry notes proclaim
  A graver still divinity?
    This hope, this sanctity of fear?
    *O innocent throat! O human ear!*

## MATERNITY

One wept whose only child was dead,
New-born, ten years ago.
"Weep not; he is in bliss," they said.
She answered, "Even so:

"Ten years ago was born in pain
A child, not now forlorn.
But O, ten years ago, in vain,
A mother, a mother was born."

## THE WATERSHED

*Lines written between Munich and Verona*

Black mountains pricked with pointed pine
A melancholy sky.
Out-distanced was the German vine,
The sterile fields lay high.
From swarthy Alps I travelled forth
Aloft; it was the north, the north;
Bound for the Noon was I.

I seemed to breast the streams that day;
I met, opposed, withstood
The northward rivers on their way,
My heart against the flood—
My heart that pressed to rise and reach,
And felt the love of altering speech,
Of frontiers, in its blood.

But O the unfolding South! the burst
Of summer! O to see
Of all the southward brooks the first!
The travelling heart went free
With endless streams; that strife was stopped;
And down a thousand vales I dropped,
I flowed to Italy.

## IN SLEEP

I DREAMT (no "dream" awake—a dream indeed)
A wrathful man was talking in the Park:
"Where are the Higher Powers, who know our need
And leave us in the dark?

"There are no Higher Powers; there is no heart
In God, no love"—his oratory here,
Taking the paupers' and the cripples' part,
Was broken by a tear.

And then it seemed that One who did create
Compassion, who alone invented pity,
Walked, as though called, in at that north-east gate,
Out from the muttering city;

Threaded the little crowd, trod the brown grass,
Bent o'er the speaker close, saw the tear rise,
And saw Himself, as one looks in a glass,
In those impassioned eyes.

" You never attained to Him." " If to attain
Be to abide, then that may be."
" Endless the way, followed with how much pain! "
" The way was He."

## "I AM THE WAY"

Thou art the Way.
Hadst Thou been nothing but the goal,
  I cannot say
If Thou hadst ever met my soul.

  I cannot see—
I, child of process—if there lies
  An end for me,
Full of repose, full of replies.

  I'll not reproach
The way that goes, my feet that stir.
  Access, approach,
Art Thou, time, way, and wayfarer.

So humble things Thou hast borne for us, O God,
Left'st Thou a path of lowliness untrod?
Yes, one, till now; another Olive-Garden.
For we endure the tender pain of pardon,—
One with another we forbear. Give heed,
Look at the mournful world Thou hast decreed.
The time has come. At last we hapless men
Know all our haplessness all through. Come, then,
Endure undreamed humility: Lord of Heaven,
Come to our ignorant hearts and be forgiven!

## TO THE BODY

Thou inmost, ultimate
Council of judgment, palace of decrees,
Where the high senses hold their spiritual state,
Sued by earth's embassies,
And sign, approve, accept, conceive, create;

Create—thy senses close
With the world's pleas. The random odours reach
Their sweetness in the place of thy repose,
Upon thy tongue the peach,
And in thy nostrils breathes the breathing rose.

To thee, secluded one,
The dark vibrations of the sightless skies,
The lovely inexplicit colours run;
The light gropes for those eyes.
O thou august! thou dost command the sun.

Music, all dumb, hath trod
Into thine ear her one effectual way;
And fire and cold approach to gain thy nod,
Where thou call'st up the day,
Where thou awaitest the appeal of God.

With this ambiguous earth
His dealings have been told us. These abide:
The signal to a maid, the human birth,
The lesson, and the young Man crucified.

But not a star of all
The innumerable host of stars has heard
How He administered this terrestrial ball.
Our race have kept their Lord's entrusted Word.

Of His earth-visiting feet
None knows the secret, cherished, perilous,
The terrible, shamefast, frightened, whispered, sweet,
Heart-shattering secret of His way with us.

No planet knows that this
Our wayside planet, carrying land and wave,
Love and life multiplied, and pain and bliss,
Bears, as chief treasure, one forsaken grave.

Nor, in our little day,
May His devices with the heavens be guessed,
His pilgrimage to thread the Milky Way
Or His bestowals there be manifest.

But in the eternities,
Doubtless we shall compare together, hear
A million alien Gospels, in what guise
He trod the Pleiades, the Lyre, the Bear.

O, be prepared, my soul!
To read the inconceivable, to scan
The million forms of God those stars unroll
When, in our turn, we show to them a Man.

## INTIMATIONS OF MORTALITY

FROM RECOLLECTIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

A simple child . . . .
That lightly draws its breath
And feels its life in every limb,
What should it know of death?

*Wordsworth*

It knows but will not tell.
Awake, alone, it counts its father's years—
How few are left—its mother's. Ah, how well
It knows of death, in tears.

If any of the three—
Parents and child—believe they have prevailed
To keep the secret of mortality,
I know that two have failed.

The third, the lonely, keeps
One secret—a child's knowledge. When they come
At night to ask wherefore the sweet one weeps,
Those hidden lips are dumb.

## TIME'S REVERSALS

### A DAUGHTER'S PARADOX

To his devoted heart*
  Who, young, had loved his ageing mate for life,
In late lone years Time gave the elder's part,
  Time gave the bridegroom's boast, Time gave a younger wife.

A wilder prank and plot
  Time soon will promise, threaten, offering me
Impossible things that Nature suffers not—
  A daughter's riper mind, a child's seniority.

O, by my filial tears
  Mourned all too young, Father! On this my head
Time yet will force at last the longer years,
  Claiming some strange respect for me from you, the dead.

Nay, nay! Too new to know
  Time's conjuring is, too great to understand.
Memory has not died; it leaves me so—
  Leaning a fading brow on your unfaded hand.

*Dr. Johnson outlived by 30 years his wife, who was 20 years his senior.

# TO ANTIQUITY

". . . REVERENCE FOR OUR FATHERS, WITH THEIR STORES OF EXPERIENCES"

O OUR young ancestor,
  Our boy in Letters, how we trudge oppressed
With our "experiences," and you of yore
  Flew light, and blessed!

Youngling, in your new town,
  Tight, like a box of toys—the town that is
Our shattered, open ruin, with its crown
  Of histories;

You with your morning words
  Fresh from the night, your yet un-sonneted moon,
Your passion undismayed, cool as a bird's
  Ignorant tune;

O youngling! how is this?
  Your poems are not wearied yet, not dead.
Must I bow low? or, with an envious kiss,
  Put you to bed?

## "RIVERS UNKNOWN TO SONG"

*James Thomson*

Wide waters in the waste; or, out of reach,
  Rough Alpine falls where late a glacier hung;
Or rivers groping for the alien beach,
  Through Continents, unsung.

Nay, not these nameless, these remote, alone;
  But all the streams from all the watersheds—
Peneus, Danube, Nile—are the unknown,
  Young in their ancient beds.

Man has no tale for them. O travellers swift
  From secrets to oblivion! Waters wild
That pass in act to bend a flower, or lift
  The bright limbs of a child!

For they are new, they are fresh; there's no surprise
  Like theirs on earth. O strange for evermore!
This moment's Tiber with his shining eyes
  Never saw Rome before.

Man has no word for their eternity—
  Rhine, Avon, Arno, younglings, youth uncrowned:
Ignorant, innocent, instantaneous, free,
  Unwelcomed, unrenowned.

## AT NIGHT

*To W. M.*

Home, home from the horizon far and clear,
  Hither the soft wings sweep;
Flocks of the memories of the day draw near
  The dovecote doors of sleep.

O, which are they that come through sweetest light
  Of all these homing birds?
Which with the straightest and the swiftest flight?
  Your words to me, your words!

"The last verse of that perfectly heavenly 'Letter from a Girl to Her Own Old Age,' the whole of 'San Lorenzo's Mother,' and the end of the sonnet 'To a Daisy,' are the finest things I have yet seen or felt in modern verse."—JOHN RUSKIN.

"I am about to direct attention to one of the very rarest products of nature and grace—a woman of genius, one who, I am bound to confess, has falsified the assertion I made some time ago that no female writer of our time has attained to true 'distinction.' In a sense in which the term can scarcely be applied to the work of any other woman, ancient or modern, it seems to me that hers is 'great.'"—COVENTRY PATMORE.

"In its class, I know of no nobler or more beautiful sonnet than 'Renouncement'; and I have so considered it ever since the day I first heard it, when Rossetti (who knew it by heart), repeating it to me, added that it was one of the three finest sonnets ever written by women."—WILLIAM SHARP.

"To the metrical themes attempted by her, she brings emotion, sincerity, together with an exquisite play upon our finer chords quite her own, not to be heard from another. The writing is limpid in its depths. Her manner presents to me the image of one accustomed to walk in holy places and keep the eye of a fresh mind on our tangled world."—GEORGE MEREDITH.

"The footfalls of her muse waken not sounds, but silences. We lift a feather from the marsh and say: 'This way went a heron.' . . . It is poetry, the spiritual voice of which will become audible when the 'high noises' of to-day have followed the feet that made them."—FRANCIS THOMPSON.

"By those whose love of poetry claims them wholly—making demands on the intellect as well as on the heart,

on the spiritual being as well as on the senses—it has long been recognised that Alice Meynell is among the imperishable names. She has given to English Literature now, and to the Literature of the world in centuries to come, what no other poet has been able to give—a volume of little more than a hundred pages containing only masterpieces. These poems, though they are caught up into the universal voice of great poetry, are like no others."—Alfred Noyes.

"Mrs. Meynell's poems are terse, significant, and symmetrical. Their form is their own—the natural expression of their very modern intuitions; but the contemporaries of Herbert and Vaughan would have revelled in her use of images; for with her an image is neither a mere metaphor—another way of saying the same thing—nor a simile—a little separate picture introduced to adorn a narrative,—but a real transposition by which the very key of a song is changed. In her work an image is not a conceit, it is something essential, almost always giving more insight than it promised, and often becoming the very substance of the poem. Mrs. Meynell's genius is sundered by leagues of tenderness and self-restraint from that of the fierce and gloomy Dean (Donne), but she seems to me to resemble him in her originality of metaphysical drama. Certainly there is no modern poem more original than the 'Letter from a Girl to Her Own Old Age,' none since Donne which looks more profoundly or more sadly into the abysmal depths of personality. This is high poetry; and yet, as Mrs. Meynell has herself told us, there is a higher: 'Plain behind oracles it is; and past all symbols simple; perfect, heavenly, and wild.' In her own 'Renouncement' there is this higher quality. I cannot foresee the generation which that poem will not delight."—Sir Henry Newbolt.

"I am soberly convinced that the prose of Alice Meynell is absolutely the most perfect produced in our language for at least twenty years." (Written in 1914 in a

review of her then newly published volume of Selected Prose.) "I know the movements that open the essay called 'The Horizon' as well as I know the cadences of the 'Grecian Urn' or 'Kubla Khan'—better in fact, because prose has always meant more to me than verse. These paragraphs I fell irrecoverably in love with years ago, and I still find them almost flawless in their exactness and beauty. If it is naturally in the Essays that deal with the universal elements of life, with hills and clouds and rivers and flowers and rain that we seem to catch most clearly the implicit testimony to the transforming power of honest vision, it is where the subjects are humaner, where Mrs. Meynell deals with mortal idiosyncrasies and laws, that her sensibility makes discoveries beyond the reach of science, and formulates perceptions that make some of her pages sibylline."—Dixon Scott.

"It is a tragic truism to say that in Alice Meynell England has lost a great poet; and this is not the sort of comment, nor am I the sort of commentator, to say what else we have lost—one of the most magnanimous of friends, one of the wisest and most generous of women. Others can tell much better than I the story of her life and the personal side of her genius, personal as well as literary though my own admiration has been. She was deservedly famous long before I had the honour of any personal knowledge of her; but I will venture the prophecy that her fullest fame is yet to come. The whole modern world must commeasurably enlarge itself before it comes near the measure of her mind."—G. K. Chesterton.

"Alice Meynell was among the six or seven best women writers in the records of English Literature, and the only one of them to attain greatness as an essayist. She led an active and varied life. She bore and brought up a large family; she entertained a large circle of friends; and Francis Thompson was only the most conspicuous of many writers who went to her counsel and encourage-

ment. At seventy she still gave an impression of youth and beauty. She sat, quiet Roman dignity in her mien; vivacity, feeling, sympathy in her eyes: a saint and a sibyl smoking a cigarette."—J. C. SQUIRE.

"Never, surely, was a lady who carried her learning and wore the flower of her gentle humane sanctity with such quiet grace, with so understanding a smile. The touch of exquisite asceticism about her seemed to accent the sensitive sympathy of her manner, the manner of one, quite humanly in this world, with all its varied interests, yet not of it."—RICHARD LE GALLIENNE.

"With an exquisite singleness of genius she stands apart and escapes the categories. The more you live with these pages, the more will you be persuaded that they contain the stuff of immortality. Half a dozen and more of her shining contemporaries competed in vain to spoil her with praises. It was what no one could do. Recognition only made her humble."—J. L. GARVIN.

## ALICE MEYNELL

Her thought was stone: O frugal Poet, hard
Cut the spare chisel on each separate gem—
Jasper and onyx, emerald and sard:
Craft and integrity have fashioned them.

V. SACKVILLE-WEST.

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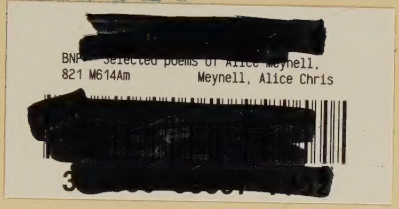


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